

The Difference Between A Psychopath And A Sociopath

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In today's society it is not uncommon to hear people joke around with each other, calling one another a "psychopath" or a "sociopath." It is often used as a synonym for "crazy" or "over the top." Most people can say that they have thrown the two different terms around loosely at some point. Contrary to popular belief or common misconception, psychopaths and sociopaths are not the same thing. Even when taking into consideration the similarities, psychopaths and sociopaths are actually quite different, and knowing the difference between a psychopath and a sociopath is extremely crucial because as there are differences between the two, there are also completely different ways to handle the people who have these mental illnesses - including different methods of treatment. It is also important to look at research to see if there are any possible ways to prevent the illness from happening in the first place. It is also important for people to understand that just because it is a mental illness, only 4 percent of the population is diagnosed as a psychopath or sociopath. It is still, in fact, a mental illness in which people have no control - like depression, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), or anxiety. It is also pivotal that people understand that of the 4 percent of people with psychopathy and sociopathy, not all of them are actively violent. While psychopaths and sociopaths have many similarities, like the people who have these illnesses, they are unique in their own ways.

One of the main differences between psychopaths and sociopaths is that a person who is a psychopath is born with the mental illness. The mental disease is characterized with lack of guilt/remorse, no empathy, absence of deep emotional attachments, persistent narcissism, impeccable superficial charm, repetitive dishonesty, constant manipulateness, and reckless risk-taking. (Tracy, N. 2017) Scientifically, psychopathy has proven to be a lack of proper neurological structure specifically having to do with the structure in the brain called the amygdala.

The amygdala is the almond-shaped part of the brain that is found in both hemispheres, and it is responsible for fear conditioning. Fear conditioning is a learning process in which a person is continually presented with situations and taught to actually “fear” them over a matter of time. The amygdala is also responsible for causing arousal and emotional responses in a person. When somebody is born with an abnormal defect to their amygdala, they can potentially be a psychopath, or on the complete opposite spectrum, the person can be stricken with constant anxiety. Because of this defect in the amygdala, psychopaths are not able to develop a sense of morality or ethics. With no moral compass telling them what is right and wrong, it makes it easier to commit crimes in cold blood. Psychopaths also crave control, and while they are able to judge the situation, they tend to pick the more sinister and harmful route, while feeling no remorse for their actions. (Tracy, N. 2017) Psychopathy is seen as the more dangerous when compared to sociopathy for multiple reasons. First, psychopaths are more careful when plotting their crimes. They go through every possible outcome, and they have a plan for each one in order to not get caught. This makes it difficult when law enforcement is attempting to find the psychopath because they have done everything in their power to cover their tracks and not get caught, no matter who it affects or hurts in the process. Secondly, psychopaths have no emotional connections, even with their own family members. This lack of any emotional connection means that just because somebody is related to a psychopath does not mean that the psychopath is any less likely to commit as heinous of a crime against them because they are blood related. A psychopath could be born and raised in the most loving, thoughtful, kind home, but he/she would still not think twice about harming a family member just the same as he/she would a stranger on the street. Lastly, psychopathy can be considered the more dangerous disorder because of the

lack of guilt the person feels. If a person feels absolutely no guilt at all, they are much more likely to commit repeated, wicked, unspeakable crimes because they just do not care. One of the most notorious psychopaths known today is Theodore (Ted) Bundy. Ted Bundy was a famous serial killer in the United States who was believed to have started his brutal murdering at the age of 14. Between 1974-1978 Ted Bundy kidnapped, brutally assaulted, and killed around thirty women. There are many men and women like Bundy, but something that stands out is that male psychopaths outnumber women psychopaths about nine to one. No matter the gender, psychopaths are dangerous. Even if they are not always violent, they will always have the potential to harm anybody around them.

A sociopath, on the other hand, is a specific type of person with a cluster B antisocial personality disorder. People with antisocial personality disorders have a complete lack of remorse for their, often criminal, behaviors. One might find evidence of a person with an antisocial personality disorder in a child who tortures animals, bullies peers, vandalizes, and steals. There are three clusters of the antisocial personality disorders - A, B, and C. Cluster A is the odd and eccentric group where Schizoids and Paranoids are classified. Cluster C is the anxious and fearful cluster, such as the obsessive compulsive disorder and dependent personality disorder. Cluster B, which characterizes the psychopaths and sociopaths, are the people that are extremely dramatic, emotional, and unpredictable. Sociopathy is recognized as somebody who has repeated violations of the law, who is a pervasive liar, who is a master with deception, and who is prone to physical aggressiveness. A sociopath might also be known to have reckless disregard for safety of self or others, consistent irresponsibility in work and family environments, and a complete lack of most kinds of remorse. In difference to psychopathy, sociopathy is a

mental illness that can only be officially diagnosed at the age of 18 or older because children under 18 have not yet reached their emotional and physiological maturity. (Weller, C. 2017) A sign of sociopathy could be a misinterpreted sign of immaturity. Sociopathy is also a mental illness that is not something with which a person is born, but instead, it is something that is formed during one's lifetime. (Tracy, N. 2017) A person can become a sociopath due to physical or sexual abuse or even a traumatic accident especially if damage is done to the paralimbic system. The paralimbic system in the brain is the structure that is greatly involved in emotional processing, self control, and motivation. Because sociopathy is something that comes later in one's lifetime, contrary to psychopaths, they do have some type of moral compass. This means that a sociopath is able to have somewhat an emotional connection to someone and genuinely care about that person. Their moral compass is not always dangerously skewed, but is obviously not typical, and it is "off" in some way. Sociopaths are able to love, care for, and feel empathy for people if they choose to do so and allow themselves to feel those emotions. Sociopaths also differ from psychopaths in tending to be extremely unorganized, nervous, agitated, and unpredictable. (Weller, C. 2017) These are the kinds of people that are more likely to act out in spontaneous, inappropriate ways without thinking through all of the possible consequences rather than methodically plotting. One of the greatest examples in today's pop culture of sociopathy is fictional character Raymond Reddington in Netflix's "[The Blacklist](#)." Reddington is a high profile FBI most wanted criminal who is a notorious killer and has little to no empathy for most people, other than special agent, Agent Keen. Reddington was not always a stone cold killer. He used to have a normal family, life, and job until a traumatic fire, constant beatings, and having it all taken away from him literally psychologically changed him into a sociopath. Along with

psychopaths, sociopaths are capable of horrible crimes, but the significant difference is that sociopaths tend to be much more spontaneous and quick to anger. This means that sociopaths are much more likely to have run ins with the law because the probability of catching a sociopath after they commit a crime is much higher due to the fact that the situation was not as well planned out and thought through.

The topic of psychopaths and sociopaths have come about in previous classes I have taken like General Psychology class and Developmental Psychology, which were classes I was in last year. It was nice go through General Psychology first because not only did we dig into these two mental illnesses a bit, but we also focused on the parts of the brain and each of the different structures and their responsibilities. I am currently in Social Psychology as well, and we briefly brushed on the subject every once and awhile. All of these classes have helped me gain a significant understanding to what psychopathy and sociopathy truly are.

Psychologists and other scientists have learned a life changing amount of information about psychopaths and sociopaths within the past few decades. Scientists have learned the differences in the brain scans, the differences, and how to start seeing signs of psychopathy and sociopathy. The one thing that still seems to lack when researching these two illnesses is how there is still little information and studies on how to fix or cure the people. I can see where this could be difficult when I think about it because how do you make somebody feel empathy and love? There is no pill, treatment, or vaccine to make somebody care, but this makes me wonder if there ever will be? Psychopaths also do not care that they are psychopaths, so it is difficult to try and help them. This subject has really challenged me, my worldview, and especially my faith. I was somebody who tossed around the word “psychopath” like it was nothing. My friends would

do something dumb, or I would call one of their ex boyfriends one. I knew the surface of what is was, but I had no idea there was even a difference between psychopath and sociopath. This paper has deepened my knowledge and understanding. Once we talked about this topic in class I knew I would want to do my research paper over it. I have always been head over heels for crime television shows and movies, so I thought this would just be something in which I would enjoy researching. The more I have learned about psychopaths and sociopaths, the more the Lord has placed a heaviness on my heart. My life revolves around love. It revolves around the love of my parents, sister, friends, and most importantly, the love of God. It hurts me to think that people do not feel that. This research has really laid heavy on my faith with the major question I've been asking myself: Can psychopaths/ sociopaths be Christians? Obviously, God can and does forgive all of the horrible crimes they commit, and if they believe in Him, they can be Christians. What I mean is first off, do these mentally ill people really even care or want His forgiveness? Are they capable of fathoming His gift of eternal life? If they are incapable of forming emotional bonds then how are they going to have a relationship with the Lord? The second thing that has really bothered me is when I started to wonder how Christians are ministering to these people? Are there Christian organizations enveloping the mentally ill in love? I believe as a society we like to think of the Great Commission as going off in the middle of the jungles into different countries to people who have never heard of the Good News. That is important. We need to do that, but I think we sometimes forget about the people right in our own country, state, and sometimes even town. What about prisons? What about the psychopaths and sociopaths living among us? It is amazing to me how fast people will sign up to serve around the world in the middle of war, poverty, and skyrocketing crime, but if the county jail or prison asked for volunteers to lead a

bible study or worship service with complete security, will there still be a full sign up sheet? No. As a society, I think we have brushed off psychopaths and sociopaths as the people who deserve to be locked up in a prison, and placed them in the category of people who are not worth our time, love, or effort. It is hard for me to grasp the fact that God still made these people, and loves them. This means we should love them as well. Psychopaths and sociopaths are still God's people who we as Christians are called to love. Why were they born or grew up to be diagnosed with this mental illness? I do not know. I will never know. What I do know is that it is not my place to doubt or ask questions, but it is our Christian duty to love His creation, even if the people who are incapable of loving us back.



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